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Socio-economic Series

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HOUSING CANADA'S YOUTH

Data from the 1996 census confirm that children are leaving home at an increasingly later age.

Introduction

As societies became urbanized and industrialized, young people left the parental home when the time came to marry or establish a family. In the 1960s and 1970s when the economy was growing and values changing rapidly, young people generally left their parents to live alone or to share accommodation. This behavior, which both reflected and stimulated increased construction of apartments, took on increasing importance as a dimension, or even symbol, of the process of acquiring maturity, even though significant ethnocultural variations among young people persist. However, in the 1990s, young people under 30 are leaving the parental home later than they did 15 years ago, because prolonged studies combined with restructuring of the job market are such that they are less certain to earn an income that is stable and high enough to support a household.

To what extent, in what respect and for whom does the "cluttered nest" pose a problem or generate a housing need? What happens to young people who finally leave the parental home? Do they manage to find suitable housing? This edition of Research and Development Highlights presents a brief picture of the housing conditions of youth in Canada and is based on a systematic review of Canadian and international literature and analysis of various Canadian statistical data bases.

Leaving the parental home

In Canada, the transition from living in the parental home toward what our society is inclined to call "adult" living arrangements tends to take place as youth enter their mid-20s. For young Canadians as a whole, Figure 1 (based on 1991 census data) shows that in the 15-19 age group, some 90% are still living with their parents. Among those aged 20-24, almost 60% of males still live in the parental home, but the corresponding figure for females is only 43%, reflecting the tendency for young women to marry or cohabit at an earlier age. In the 25-29 age group, living with parents is no longer widespread, but still

more common among men than among women. Men are also more likely to be living alone or sharing accommodation, while almost two-thirds of women (but barely half of men) are living as married. Another 7% of women, but less than 1% of men, head lone-parent families.

The living arrangements of young people vary significantly by region. Moreover, leaving the parental home is not always final, since the transition from adolescence to adulthood tends to follow many routes and may not be linear. Several factors, whether combined or in isolation, are part of the process leading to the decision to stay in the parental home, leave, or return:

- Age
- Gender
- Emotional ties and social bonds within the parental family
- Incomes of youth and those of their parents
- Location of jobs, and educational and cultural opportunities in relation to the parental home (variations between small and large cities, declining areas, etc.)
- Supply of affordable and suitable housing.

On the whole, with the rather notable exception of Aboriginal youth, young people living with their parents are adequately housed in a material sense. However, those hoping to become autonomous but lacking the means to do so, can lose self-esteem, which has an adverse effect on the transition to adulthood.



Nonetheless, the fact that some youth either live with their parents longer or return to the family home, can benefit everyone, so long as:

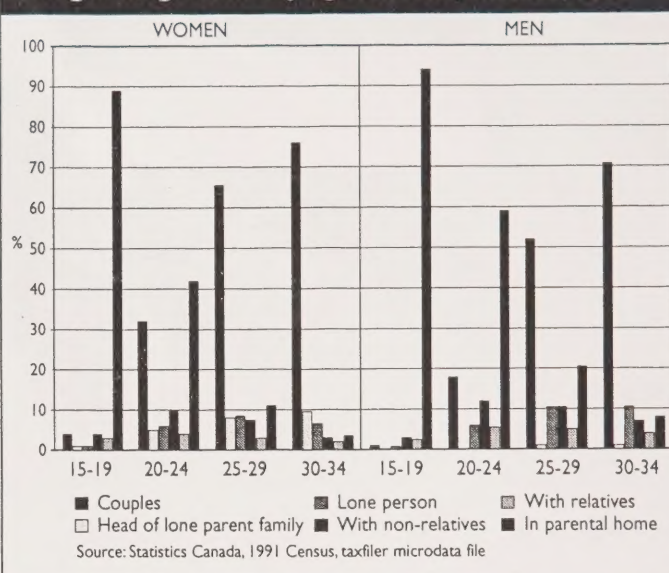
- the parents' resources are sufficient (financial means, spacious housing);
- the parental home is welcoming and safe for young people;
- both generations have found a balance which they find satisfactory and enables them to maintain their autonomy, ties, and private lives;
- remaining at home is part of an active strategy to enable young people to pursue their studies, put money aside, or live out their youth.

Young people who leave home

Fewer and fewer young households consist of a husband and wife. In 1995, 30% of households headed by someone between 15 and 24 were one-person households, and there were as many people living alone as there were husband and wife households (Table 1). Since 1988, the number and proportion of lone-parent households have increased, and husband and wife households decreased. The proportion of husband and wife families has also declined among households headed by a person in the 25-29 age group. Young people who live alone and those who head a lone-parent family are working full time less than before, and husband and wife families headed by a young person under 30 are increasingly less able to count on income earned by both partners working full time. Consequently, young people, more so than other groups, have seen their incomes decline over time. Husband and wife households who own their dwellings are the only group that has not followed this trend.

In households headed by a young person between 15 and 24, average income, expressed in 1994 dollars, decreased from \$31,400 in 1987 to \$27,600 in 1994, a drop of 12% or \$3,800 in 7 years.

Figure 1:
Living arrangements by age and sex, Canada, 1991



The proportion of young renter households facing an affordability problem because they spend 30% or more of their income on housing increased from 35% in 1988 to 50% in 1995 among those with heads between 15 and 24 and from 23% to 30% in the 25-29 group. However, CMHC estimates that some households spending 30% or more of their income on housing could find less expensive housing of suitable size and quality. For most rental households, there are fewer in core housing need than there are spending 30% or more of their incomes on housing (Figure 2). However, this situation is reversed for young single-parent families headed by a woman: some manage to get by on less than 30%, but they live in housing which is of poor quality or too small, and they could not find adequate housing without devoting more than 30% or more of their income to shelter.

Table 1:
Type of household by age of household head, Canada, 1988, 1991 and 1995

Type of household (as % of all households)	15-24			25-29		
	1988	1991	1995	1988	1991	1995
Single-family (husband-wife)	35.5	31.8	30.3	57.2	57.3	54.0
Single-family (lone-parent)	6.6	8.5	11.2	6.4	6.3	8.4
One person	30.7	30.9	29.7	23.8	23.5	24.3
Other	27.1	28.9	28.7	12.5	12.8	13.3
Total	99.9	100.1	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada – Household Facilities by Income, 1988, 1991 and 1995

The proportion of households consisting of young tenants in core housing need increased from 31% in 1991 to 40% in 1995 among those in the 15-24 group and from 15.5% to 24% for 25-29 year-olds.

Affordability is by far the main cause of core housing need, more so with under 30 year-olds than older groups. Families with children often end up in housing that is too small. These objective evaluations by CMHC were confirmed by the satisfaction expressed by young households in 1993: households with children were among those least satisfied with the space available to them (Household Facilities by Income and Other Characteristics, 1993, microdata file).

In 1992, tenants under 30 spent less on average on rent than those in the 30-44 group (\$6,680 and \$7,333 respectively), whereas young home owners spent a little more on housing (\$10,942 and \$10,547 respectively). However, young home owners spend a proportionately higher share of their budget on housing (21%) than 30-44 year-olds (17%), given their lower incomes. Housing accounts for 32% of total expenditures for lone-parent families (Figure 2). In fact, housing and food make up half of their expenditures.

In 1995, the percentage of homeowners stood at 13% for those in the 15-24 group, 38% for the 25-29s, 55.5% for the 30-34s and 74% for the 35-64s. Although the percentage of homeowners declined among those under 30 between 1976 to 1991, it has apparently stabilized since that time. According to a recent CMHC survey, the dream of one day owning a home is still very much present among young Canadians, who are willing to

use various strategies to achieve this objective (CMHC, 1995, Consumer Housing Preferences in the 1990s).

Homeless youth

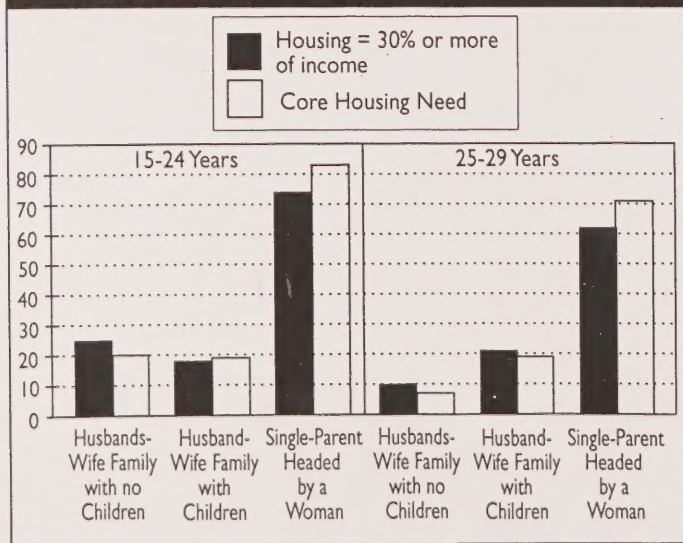
According to some reports, the youth segment of the homeless population has increased considerably over the last several years. Since young people on their own often have low incomes, they are among the groups most likely to experience the kinds of housing conditions that could result in homelessness. Factors include the inability to pay rent, poor housing conditions, evictions, and not being able to find other housing. Economic downturns and cutbacks in certain programs also play a role in the loss of housing.

When young people become homeless, they can be helped by a wide range of different forms of assistance. Availability of suitable housing plays a role in both the prevention of youth homelessness and in times of crisis. Holistic approaches seem to be the most promising strategies for assisting young people to find housing.

Conclusion

It is difficult to state whether the longer time it takes those under 30 to form their own households (when compared with the generation before them) is an aberration or the beginning of a new trend. It is also hard to know whether this phenomenon will have any repercussions on their future choice of housing. Perhaps the precariousness of the job market is becoming the norm for young persons in future generations, with graduates having to struggle with very heavy debt loads. Innovative approaches could help them acquire suitable housing, and even attain home ownership. Perhaps the opposite is true – current job market disruptions may result in the creation of new employment, which will offer stability and career opportunities to young persons. In any event, to ensure a more effective match between supply and demand, much attention should be paid to young people between the ages of 15 and 29 as they complete their education and enter the work force.

Figure 2:
Proportion of tenants spending 30% or more of their income on housing and proportion in core housing need by age group, Canada, 1995



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Research Report: Housing Canada's Youth

Research Consultant: INRS-Urbanisation Institut national de la recherche scientifique (Université du Québec)

A full report on this project is available from the Canadian Housing Information Centre at the address below.

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